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Carter, Advisers Discuss Cuba-Based Soviet Troops

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WASHINGTON—President Carter conferred Tuesday with his top advisers on what should be done about the presence of Soviet combat troops in Cuba. The advisers then met in unusual session to map their proposals.

The conclusions of the President's Policy Review Committee were communicated to Carter late in the day, but the White House refused to provide any details.

Press Secretary Jody Powell said merely that "the President has discussed (Cuba) with his advisers and his advisers have met separately."

Attending the meeting of the Policy Review Committee were Vice President Mondale, Secretary of State Cyrus R. Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, CIA Director Stansfield Turner and national security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

The White House meeting came as the Soviet troop issue threatened to balloon into a major controversy with today's reconvening of the 95th Con-

gress after a month-long recess.

The brigade-size Soviet force in Cuba was detected after reexamination of intelligence data following a National Security Council order in late July to intensify scrutiny of such information and to improve analysis of the Soviet-Cuban relationship.

The council's action followed the overthrow of the Nicaraguan government by the Sandinista National Liberation Front. Administration officials say they believe the overthrow was helped "significantly" by Havana.

The consensus within the Administration now appears to be that the Soviet "brigade" in Cuba has been growing since at least 1976 and perhaps since 1974, and that it is primarily a "hand-holding" force intended to insure Cubans against American retaliation while Cuban troops were intervening in Africa.

The prevailing theory among Administration officials is that the Cubans, when they agreed to act as Soviet surrogates in Angola and Ethiopia, recognized that Vietnam-fatigued Washington would not retaliate immediately but might strike back, politically or militarily as the Cubans continued their new role on the African continent.

In this view, the Soviet "brigade" has no military significance because it is too small to stop any determined invasion. But it has considerable political significance, both in terms of domestic American politics and in the Soviet-American relationship.

One official likened it to the "trip wire" role of U.S. forces in West Berlin. The GIs could not hold off a Soviet attack for long, he said, but such an attack on American troops would require a Washington counterblow.

"We've been amazingly ignorant about the Soviet military growth in Cuba," one official conceded. "We don't know its timing, its pace or its dimensions. We only know enough to be embarrassed."

Satellite and spy plane photos, plus electronic intercepts and other intelligence led to suspicions of a Soviet

brigade months ago.

Cuban surveillance operations have been short-changed in personnel and money, one official complained. "The CIA has been almost allergic to the subject," he maintained.

In part this "intelligence gap" was the result of Administration efforts in 1977 to improve relations with Havana by stopping spy plane overflights for about six months. Policy-level officials who supported that suspension were reluctant in 1979 to interpret the confusing intelligence information to mean that a Soviet brigade was present.

"You can't just walk in there (into Cuba) and ask who they are, you know," one official said. Russians and Cubans wear the same uniforms, drive the same tanks. Sometimes, photography analysts must find clues on athletic fields. A baseball diamond probably means a Cuban unit, since Russians don't play the game. The language used in radio messages provides better evidence of the nationality of the troops.

Because of the White House meeting, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was forced to postpone until today a closed hearing that had been scheduled for Tuesday afternoon, on why U.S. intelligence had failed to detect the Soviet troops' presence in Cuba earlier.

After denying as recently as July 27 that there had been any significant increase in Soviet troop strength in Cuba, the State Department last Friday confirmed the presence of "what appears to be a Soviet combat unit of between 2,000 and 3,000 men."

Accompanying Turner to the Foreign Relations hearings will be Adm. B. R. Inman, director of the Pentagon's National Security Agency, Lt. Gen. Eugene F. Tighe Jr., director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, and David D. Newson undersecretary of state for political affairs.

Vance also will testify before the committee this afternoon after a morning press conference.